

THE TREATMENT AND NURSING OF A SURGICAL CASE IN THE YEAR 1569 *

[Nurses as well as physicians must be absorbed in the wonderfully interesting life and work of the famous French surgeon of the sixteenth century, from which we extract the following.—ED.]

THE Duke of Ascot had sent to the King of France, humbly asking he would do him so much kindness and honor as to permit and command his chief surgeon (Paré) to visit M. le Marquis d'Auret, his brother, who had received a gunshot wound of the knee, with fracture of the bone, about seven months ago, and the physicians and surgeons all this time had been unable to heal him.

The King sent Paré, whose narrative follows:

“I found him (the patient) in a high fever, his eyes deep sunken, with a moribund and yellowish face, his tongue dry and parched, and the whole body much wasted and lean, the voice low, as of a man near death; and I found his thigh much inflamed, suppurating, and ulcerated, discharging a greenish and very offensive sanies. I probed it with a silver probe, wherewith I found a large cavity in the middle of the thigh and others round the knee, sanguous and cuniculate; also several scales of bone, some loose, others not. The leg was greatly swelled and imbued with a pituitous humor . . . and bent and drawn back. There was a large bedsore; he could rest neither day nor night, and had no appetite to eat, but very thirsty. I was told he often fell into a faintness of the heart, and sometimes as in epilepsy; and often he felt sick, with such trembling he could not raise his hands to his mouth. . . .

“Having seen him, I went a walk in the garden, and prayed God He would show me this grace, that he should recover: and that He would bless our hands and medicaments, to fight such a complication of diseases. I discussed in my mind the means I must take to do this. They called me to dinner. I came into the kitchen, and there I saw, taken out of the great pot, half a sheep, a quarter of veal, three great pieces of beef, two fowls, and a very big piece of bacon, with abundance of good herbs; then I said to myself that the broth of the pot would be full of juices and very nourishing.

“After dinner we began our consultation, all the physicians and surgeons together, in the presence of M. le Duc d'Ascot and some gentlemen who were with him. I began to say to the surgeons that I was astonished they had not made incisions in the patient's thigh, seeing

* An extract from “Ambroise Paré and His Times” (1510-1590), by Stephen Paget. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

that it was all suppurating, and the thick matter in it very foetid and offensive, showing it had long been pent up there, and that I had found with the probe caries of the bone, and scales of bone, which were already loose. They answered me, 'Never would he consent to it;' indeed, it was near two months since they had been able to get leave to put clean sheets on his bed, and one scarcely dared to touch the coverlet, so great was his pain. Then I said, 'To heal him, we must touch something else than the coverlet of his bed.'

"Each said what he thought of the malady of the patient, and in conclusion all held it hopeless. I told them there was still some hope, because he was young, and God and Nature sometimes do things which seem to physicians and surgeons impossible. . . .

"To restore the warmth and nourishment of the body, general frictions must be made with hot cloths above, below, to right, to left, and around, to draw the blood and the vital spirits from within outward. . . . For the bedsore, he must be put in a fresh, soft bed, with clean shirt and sheets. . . . Having discoursed of the causes and complications of his malady, I said we must cure them by their contraries, and must first ease the pain, making openings in the thigh to let out the matter. . . . Secondly, having regard to the great swelling and coldness of the limb, we must apply hot bricks around it, and sprinkle them with a decoction of nerval herbs in wine and vinegar, and wrap them in napkins; and to his feet, an earthenware bottle filled with the decoction, corked, and wrapped in cloths. Then the thigh, and the whole of the leg, must be fomented with a decoction made of sage, rosemary, thyme, lavender, flowers of chamomile and melilot, red roses boiled in white wine, with a drying-powder made of oak-ashes and a little vinegar and half a handful of salt. . . .

"Thirdly, we must apply to the bedsore a large plaster made of the desiccative red ointment and of *Unguentum Comitissæ*, equal parts, mixed together, to ease his pain and dry the ulcer; and he must have a little pillow of down, to keep all pressure off it, . . . and for the strengthening of his heart we must apply over it a refrigerant of oil of water-lilies, ointment of roses, and a little saffron, dissolved in rose-vinegar and treacle, spread on a piece of red cloth.

"For the syncope, from the exhaustion of the natural forces, troubling the brain, he must have good nourishment full of juices, as raw eggs, plums stewed in wine and sugar, broth of the meat of the great pot, whereof I have already spoken; the white meat of fowls, partridges' wings minced small, and other roast meats easy to digest, as veal, kid, pigeons, partridges, thrushes, and the like, with sauce of orange, verjuice, sorrel, sharp pomegranates; or he may have them boiled, with

good herbs, as lettuce, purslain, chicory, bugloss, marigold, and the like. At night he can take barley-water, with juice of sorrel and of water-lilies, of each two ounces, with four or five grains of opium [in Parét's time the "grain" was literally "a barley-corn or grain" in weight], and the four cold seeds crushed, of each half an ounce; which is a good remedy and will make him sleep. His bread to be farm-house bread, neither too stale nor too fresh.

"For the great pain in his head, his hair must be cut, and his head rubbed with rose-vinegar just warm, and a double cloth steeped in it and put there; also a forchead-cloth of oil of roses and water-lilies and poppies, and a little opium and rose-vinegar, with a little camphor, and changed from time to time. Moreover, we must allow him to smell flowers of henbane and water-lilies, bruised with vinegar and rose-water, with a little eamphor, all wrapped in a handkerchief, to be held some time to his nose.

"And we must make artifcial rain, pouring the water from some high place into a cauldron, that he may hear the sound of it, by which means sleep shall be provoked on him.

"As for the contraction of his leg, there is hope of righting it when we have let out the pus and other humors pent up in the thigh, and have rubbed the whole knee with ointment of mallows, and oil of lilies, and a little eau-de-vie, and wrapped it in black wool with the grease left in it; and if we put under the knee a feather pillow doubled, little by little we shall straighten the leg.

"This my discourse was well approved by the physicians and surgeons.

"The consultation ended, we went back to the patient, and I made three openings in his thigh. . . . Two or three hours later I got a bed made near his old onc, with fair white sheets on it; then a strong man put him in it, and he was thankful to be taken out of his foul stinking bed.

"Soon after he asked to sleep; which he did for near four hours; and everybody in the house began to feel happy, and especially M. le Due d'Aseot, his brother.

"The following days I made injections into the depth and cavities of the ulcers, of *Aegyptiacum* dissolved sometimes in eau-de-vie, other times in wine. I applied compresses to the bottom of the sinuous tracks, to cleanse and dry the soft spongy flesh, and hollow leaden tents, that the sanies might always have a way out; and above them a large plaster of *Diacalcitheos* dissolved in wine. And I bandaged him so skilfully that he had no pain; and when the pain was gone the fever began at once to abate. Then I gave him wine to drink moderately tempered

with water, knowing it would restore and quicken the vital forces. And all that we agreed in consultation was done in due time and order; and so soon as his pains and fevers ceased, he began steadily to amend. . . . Now, I stopped there about two months. . . . Then, when I saw him beginning to be well, I told him he must have viols and violins, and a buffoon to make him laugh, which he did. In one month we got him into a chair, and he had himself carried about in his garden and at the door of his chateau, to see everybody passing by. . . . In six weeks he began to stand a little on crutches, and to put on fat and get a good natural color. . . .”

THE ANCIENTS' HOSPITALS.—A very interesting and pleasing discovery is announced from Baden, near Zurich. The learned have been discussing for ages whether anything in the way of hospitals was known to the ancients; it is not to be said that they have been disputing, for there was not material enough hitherto to support a lively argument. One might read the whole volume of Greek and Roman literature carefully without noticing one passage that could be interpreted as an allusion to a hospital. The works of Hippocrates would not have failed to speak of them, surely, if any existed, but nothing is there beyond a reference to the notes of “cases” observed in the Temple of Æsculapius. So it is generally assumed that there were no hospitals in those days; the Æslepias were “baths” with massage treatment. Scholars who hold to the other opinion can adduce only hints in its favor.

But now we hear that one has actually been discovered at Baden containing “fourteen rooms, supplied with many kinds of medical, pharmaceutical, and surgical apparatus, probes, tubes, pincers, cauterizing instruments, and even a collection of safety-pins for bandaging wounds.” But these things are familiar. “There are also medicine-spoons in bone and silver, measuring-vessels, jars and pots for ointment, some still containing traces of the ointment used.” The latest date of the coins found appears to be the reign of Hadrian. Probably it was a military hospital, for this was the station of the Seventh and Eighth Legions. But the find is certainly not less interesting on that account, for the army medical service of Rome and Greece is one of the deepest mysteries of archæology. Cæsar refers only once to his regimental surgeons—is there a single distinct allusion elsewhere? We hail with puzzled gratitude the casual remark of Xenophon that the Spartans sent their doctors to the rear when a fight impended, but we look vainly for more information from him or anybody else.—*Paris Messenger.*